

# Aristotle (Continued)

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Virtue Ethics

# Putting it all together

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The different senses of “good”:

- The goals (ends) we desire and pursue
- The Supreme (chief) goal we desire and pursue
- The thing that fulfills its function
- The things that help something fulfill its function
- The character traits and actions that stem from a good person

# Possible objections?

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- Do we have a function?
- Say we do, does it follow we should fulfill it?
- Counter-examples to the conception of Happiness?
- What to make of the Doctrine of the Mean?

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- The Doctrine of the Mean is not a doctrine of Moderation.
  - How are we to make sense of this?

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- If we mean by ‘moderation’ never feeling a lot of something, or never feeling a small amount of something, then Aristotle does not endorse moderation.
  - Maybe the intermediate (mean) state is feeling a ‘medium amount’ of an emotion, **but maybe it isn’t.**

## Example:

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- A soldier, in order to ‘hit the mean’ vis-à-vis his fear, may feel a whole lot of fear.  
E.g. out numbered 10 to 1.
- Soldier didn’t ‘freeze up’, etc
- Soldier didn’t carelessly get himself killed, etc.

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- Whatever the mean is with respect to your emotion and or actions (whether it is a lot, or a little, or a ‘medium amount’) it will not be too much, or too little.
  - A tremendous amount doesn’t necessarily mean too much; little to nothing doesn’t necessarily mean too little.

# David Hume

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Moral Subjectivism

# David Hume

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- Born in Edinburgh, Scotland (1711-1776)
- Friends with Adam Smith
- Philosophical works were largely unrecognized
- Socialized often over dinner parties

# What's for Dinner??

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University of Glasgow

# Hume's Primary Question:

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- How is it that we acquire the **moral concepts** that we have?

Likewise,

- Why do we judge some things good (right, virtuous), and other things bad (wrong, etc)

# Hume's Argues that:

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- We do not acquire our moral concepts via our reason (the moral judgments we make are not a result of what reason reveals to us):

# The Argument:

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1. If reason revealed to us what was moral, then we could discover what is moral either through examining "relations of ideas" (via a priori reasoning), or by observing "matters of fact"(via a posteriori reasoning).
2. We cannot discover what is moral by either of these ways of reasoning.
3. So, reason does not reveal to us what is moral.

# The Argument:

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Hume's explanation of premise 1

Reason is our capacity to:

- Discover what is true (facts) and false
- Draw inferences

# Explanation of premise 1...

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We can discover truth,

- Without the aid of sensory experience  
(examining ‘relations of ideas’)

Or,

- With the aid of sensory experience  
(examining ‘matters of fact’)

# Explanation for premise 1...

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Examples of discovering truth (making inferences) without the aid of the senses?

- Mathematical knowledge
- Meaning of terms
- Logical relations

# Explanation of premise 1...

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Examples of discovering truth (making inferences) with the aid of sensory experience?

- There are x number of people in the room
- The board is rectangular
- I am in a classroom
- There's someone in the hall

# Justification for premise 2

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- Recall our ability to discover truth (make inferences) by just thinking and not using our senses:

Does this ability enable us to infer (or come to know) that, say, ‘one should not inflict harm’, or that ‘murder is wrong’?

# Justification for premise 2

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- For Hume,  
The answer is NO.

WHY NOT?

Ethical “conclusions” can’t be arrived at in the same way that mathematical, logical, or semantic conclusions can be arrived at.

# Justification for premise 2

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- Can we deduce, via some formula, proof, or equation that murder is wrong?
- Does “murder” just mean “wrong”?

# Justification for premise 2

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- Now recall our ability to discover truth (make inferences) by using our senses:

Does this ability enable us to infer (or come to know) that, say, ‘one should not inflict harm’, or that ‘murder is wrong’?

# Justification for premise 2

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- Again, for Hume, the answer is NO.

Why Not?

‘The Willful Murder thought experiment’

# The Conclusion

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What is supposed to follow:

- Our reason (rationality) is not what enables us to judge certain things right and other things wrong (See slide 13).
- We can't derive an 'ought claim' from an 'is claim'
- There are no objective moral facts

# Hume's positive view.

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- But we do make moral judgments (and we do have moral concepts).

So, what is it that explains why we make these judgments (what explains why we have our moral concepts)?

# Hume's positive view

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- The answer, for Hume, is:
- Our ability to feel (experience emotion); put differently our sentiment

# Hume's positive view

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- Given our human natures, we *feel* moral disapproval towards some things, and *feel* moral approval towards others.

# Hume's positive view

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- We attach the words “wrong”, “bad”, “impermissible”, “vice” to the actions that arouse the feeling of disapproval within us.

But,

- “Murder is wrong”, for example, just means, “killing the innocent makes me feel disapproval towards that act”.

# Hume's positive view

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- We attach the words “right”, “good”, “permissible”, “virtue” to actions that make us feel moral approval.  
But,
- “Respecting others”, for example, just means, “I feel approval towards this act”

# Hume's positive view

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- In other words,  
It's not true of **the acts themselves**, that they have some property of wrongness or rightness; as if it is true that murder is wrong independent of what we *feel* about it.
- C.f. color properties

# Hume's positive view

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- NOTE: Hume is not a relativist.
  - There is widespread agreement with regards to people's judgments concerning 'right' and 'wrong'.
  - Human nature is universal

# Problems with Hume?

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- What if we were Spoks?
- Narrow view concerning nature of our reason? ('rational seeing'; self-evident)
- Maybe the property of wrongness is identical to something we do experience in the phenomenology before us?

# Future reference:

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1. If reason revealed to us that X is right or that Y is wrong, (such that we would judge that "X is in fact right or Y is in fact wrong"), then we would not be motivated to act in accordance with our judgments.
2. But we are, generally, motivated to (impelled to) act in accordance with our judgments that X is right or that Y is wrong.

So, reason does not reveal to us that X is right or that Y is wrong.

# Future reference:

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1. Something (e.g a belief) is irrational if and only if it is false.
2. Something (e.g. a belief) is false iff it fails to correctly represent (fails to agree with) what it is of or about. Likewise, something is true iff it correctly represents (it does agree with) what it is of or about. (our belief of x either accurately or inaccurately represents x)
3. Emotions and desires and the like do not represent anything. They're not of or about anything.
4. Therefore, emotions and desires cannot be false.
5. Therefore, emotions and desires cannot be irrational.